

Issue Brief

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AFGHANISTAN: STATUS, U.S. ROLE, AND IMPLICATIONS OF A SOVIET WITHDRAWAL

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AFGHANISTAN: STATUS, U.S. ROLE, AND IMPLICATIONS OF A SOVIET WITHDRAWAL

SUMMARY

The signing of the U.N.-sponsored accord on Afghanistan began a new phase both of U.S.-Soviet relations and of the Afghan war itself. As part of the accord between Pakistan and the current Afghan government, Moscow began to withdraw its troops on May 15, with a pledge to remove all within 9 months. After removing half of their forces by the August 15 deadline, the Soviets declared that they were suspending their withdrawal due to violations of the accord by Pakistan and the United States.

The accord's structure evolved from U.N.-sponsored, indirect negotiations at Geneva between Pakistan and Afghanistan that began in June 1982. The final settlement included a document signed by the United States and the U.S.S.R. as international guarantors. In an unusual step, the United States asserted its intention to continue aid to the Afghan resistance so long as the Soviets provided aid to their client government in Kabul, despite the accord's ban on aid to guerrilla forces.

U.S. assistance, channelled through Pakistan, appears to have been an important factor in the Soviet decision to withdraw. U.S. aid to the resistance has been estimated in press reports at over \$600 million yearly, with total funding since 1980 approaching \$2 billion.

The death of Pakistan's President Zia ul-Haq in an Aug. 17, 1988, plane crash added a new element of uncertainty. Thus far, Pakistan's role as a channel for arms to the Afghan resistance has not changed. It is too soon to judge what changes may occur as a result of the November 16 parliamentary election in Pakistan.

As of mid-November 1988, the Soviets were leaving open the question of whether they would complete their withdrawal by the Feb. 15, 1989, deadline. Faced with heavy military pressure from the resistance, Moscow appears to have changed its stance by calling for a political settlement between the PDPA government and its opponents as a precondition for a complete Soviet withdrawal. Apparently in an effort to bolster the regime the regime and intimidate its opponents, the Soviets have introduced "Scud-B" surface-to-surface missiles into the conflict, and reinforced their tactical air power. The resistance, meanwhile, has announced its own plan for a political settlement that would involve holding elections in January 1989 for an assembly that would appoint a head of state with powers to negotiate a cease-fire with the current Kabul government.

Several issues for U.S. policy remain. These include determining what level of aid to the resistance, if any, is appropriate to counter Soviet support of the Kabul government, determining the appropriate role for the United States in facilitating the return of the refugees and the reconstruction of the country, and deciding how to respond to Soviet warnings that they might not withdraw their forces on schedule.

ISSUE DEFINITION

The signing of the U.N.-sponsored accord on Afghanistan began a new phase both of U.S.-Soviet relations and of the Afghan war itself. As part of the accord between Pakistan and the current Afghan government, Moscow began to withdraw its troops on May 15, and has pledged to have all of them out within nine months. Uncertainties remain concerning how the accord will be implemented, including whether the Soviets will actually complete their withdrawal by the Feb. 15, 1989, deadlines. Also unclear is whether the accord's provisions for the return of the refugees can be implemented so long as the war between the Afghan protagonists continues. Congress, which has strongly backed past U.S. policy to support the Afghan resistance and bolster Pakistan's security, can be expected to monitor closely the implementation of the accord and U.S. policy towards the Afghan resistance.

Issues for the United States include: (1) what criteria and considerations should govern the stated U.S. policy of continuing to provide aid to the Afghan resistance; (2) what role the United States should play, if any, in resettling the Afghan refugees and supporting the reconstruction of the country; and (3) what response, if any, the United States should give to Soviet threats to suspend indefinitely their withdrawal.

This brief examines the developments leading up to the Afghan accord, including U.S. and Soviet policy and the impact of broader U.S.-Soviet issues, the issues raised by the accord itself, and scenarios for future developments in the ongoing conflict. More detailed background on the U.N.-sponsored Geneva talks is contained in CRS Report 88-149 F, Afghanistan Peace Talks: An Annotated Chronology and Analysis of the United Nations-Sponsored Negotiations.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Current Situation

Elements of the 1988 Accord

The accord signed at Geneva on Apr. 14, 1988, provides for a reversal of the process begun when Soviet troops poured down the Termez-Kabul highway in late December 1979. If fully carried out, the accord will likely have long-term ramifications for U.S.-Soviet relations, since it addresses one of the most important causes of a breakdown in relations during the 1980s. Moscow's offer to begin a troop withdrawal by May 15, 2 weeks before the planned Reagan-Gorbachev summit, clearly reflected a desire to create the right climate for progress on strategic arms control and other U.S.-Soviet issues. It appears equally clear that the first priority of the Reagan Administration in the negotiations leading up to the Afghan accord was getting the Soviet troops out, rather than the longer term issue of Afghanistan's future.

The Geneva accord does not of itself provide for an end to the Afghan conflict. The series of bilateral agreements signed by Pakistan and the Kabul authorities provide for mutual noninterference, a mechanism for the return of the refugees from Pakistan to Afghanistan, and linkage between these provisions and a Soviet troop withdrawal. The agreements do not, however, address the fundamental question of ending the struggle between the communist-dominated government in Kabul and the Afghan "mujahidin" (warriors for the faith). The accord brokered by the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General, Diego Cordovez, was signed by the Foreign Minister of the Soviet-backed Afghan government, which remains for the time being the governing authority. While the agreement may lead to further U.N. efforts to achieve an internal political settlement, few at the moment see much promise of such an agreement given the implacable opposition of the Afghan resistance parties to any condition involving Moscow's Afghan clients.

Status of the Soviet Withdrawal

Soviet forces began a phased withdrawal on May 15, 1988, starting with the evacuation of Jalalabad city in southeastern Afghanistan. The first troops crossed the Soviet-Afghan frontier on May 18. By the end of May, according to U.N. officials, 10,000 troops had been withdrawn. U.S. officials accept that one-half, or about 50,000, of the Soviet troops were withdrawn by the August 15 deadline. Under the accord, the remainder are to be gone in 9 months.

Recent Trends in the Military Conflict

The Soviet decision to withdraw rested heavily on the fact that the war had not been going well for Moscow. The problem for the Soviets had not been primarily one of losing battles -- though a high number had been lost. The basic military problem for the Soviets was the one that often plagues armies fighting counterinsurgency wars -- the endless, often tactically pointless and morale-destroying nature of the conflict. During the past year Soviet military efforts have appeared increasingly futile.

During 1985 and 1986 the Soviets carried out extensive and often successful attacks to destroy resistance base camps and interdict supply routes along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region. Beginning in late 1986, however, the resistance began to improve its own tactics and coordination. Bolstered by the introduction of the U.S. "Stinger" missiles -- which contributed to an estimated 150-200 aircraft losses in 1987 and severely restricted Soviet tactical air support -- the resistance began overrunning garrisons, cutting vital roads, and turning back Soviet relief columns. Except for mounting major operations to prevent the loss of important strongholds, such as temporarily relieving the besieged garrison at Khost, near the Pakistan border last December, the Soviets generally had adopted a defensive posture in the months leading up to the Geneva accord.

While the actual military situation cannot be determined reliably from available press information, many analysts see the government's military situation as deteriorating rapidly as the Soviets withdraw their forces from outlying areas in southern Afghanistan. This seems to have

caused the Soviets to alter their troop withdrawal plans so as to avoid the demoralizing fall of major towns or strategic garrisons. It appears that the resistance has decided to eliminate Afghan army outposts and capture garrison towns but not to risk extensive resistance losses or civilian casualties by attacking larger towns and cities. Long distance rocket attacks on Kabul and nearby Soviet air bases have caused significant Soviet and civilian casualties and destroyed considerable numbers of Soviet aircraft.

In October and November the resistance captured a number of strategic military posts that dominate the main supply routes across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and that secure the Kabul-Jalalabad highway. In mid-November Soviet and Afghan forces reportedly retook an important base at Towr Kham on the Kabul-Jalalabad highway, but shortly after its recapture Soviet journalists were wounded in a resistance rocket or artillery attack.

From a strategic point of view, the most important struggle appeared to be the fighting for control of Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan, the country's second largest city. Reportedly, the Soviets had employed "Backfire" heavy bombers based in the U.S.S.R. and SU-24 attack bombers to stave off the defeat of Afghan army units there. Kandahar, in the Pushtun tribal heartland, would be a prime site for the establishment of a rival government.

The introduction of SS-1 "Scud-B" tactical rockets, paraded in Kabul in early November with much fanfare, appeared to be intended to intimidate the resistance forces and Pakistan, whose border is well within their range, and to bolster the morale of the Kabul regime. The missiles have been fired into resistance positions in eastern Afghanistan and across the Pakistan border, apparently without any significant military effect.

Status of the Regime

As of late 1988 the Soviets were showing increasing pessimism about the prospects of the regime headed by Najibullah, and appeared actively looking for some formula to avoid a total political debacle. When it came to power in a military-backed coup in April 1978 the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was tiny and deeply divided between rival Parcham ("Banner") and Khalq ("Masses") wings. The Soviet invasion resulted in the eclipse of the more crudely ideological and chauvinistic Khalq faction, which had a base of power in the predominantly Pushtun-speaking officer corps. The Parcham faction headed by Babrak Karmal, which had been more pro-Soviet and "internationalist" in outlook, had a somewhat weaker base of support -- largely among the Tajik minority and urban, detribalized Pushtuns. Infighting among these factions, often bloody, largely paralysed the government for years.

The May 6, 1986, replacement of Babrak Karmal as party Secretary-General by the former head of the Afghan secret police, Lt. Gen. Najibullah, allegedly on grounds of poor health, failed to broaden the appeal of the regime and created a party backlash among Karmal supporters.

Under Najib's rule, the Soviets accelerated efforts to de-emphasize the Marxist nature of the PDPA government and create a "popular front" under the rubric of "national reconciliation." The national reconciliation program failed to gain significant support. A 6-month cease-fire, which was announced to begin Jan. 15, 1987, drew a derisive response from the Afghan resistance. In February Najibullah stated that he was prepared to meet with representatives of exile groups and the resistance on neutral ground. On July 14 he extended the cease-fire and offered specific posts, notably excluding the key internal security and foreign affairs ministries, to opponents. On July 15 the regime finally announced its new draft constitution, which deemphasized the role of the party.

In November Najibullah announced the second phase of National Reconciliation, in which he made direct appeals to the seven resistance parties headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan, promising power sharing and other political rights if they gave up their war against him. He also dropped the tell-tale "Democratic" from the official title of the country, now simply the Republic of Afghanistan, and readopted the "ullah" (of Allah) in his name after a long career as "Najib." The Soviets, meanwhile, dropped their insistence that the PDPA constitute the core of any future coalition government.

In late May Najibullah signaled yet another bid for national reconciliation on the PDPA's terms when he appointed Mohammad Hassan Sharq, a non-party politician who had been imprisoned following the Soviet invasion, as Prime Minister.

By the fall of 1988 the Soviets were clearly trying to enhance Sharq's prestige, even at the expense of Najibullah's. This included high visibility trips to the U.S.S.R. during which Sharq openly criticized aspects of Najibullah's rule. Sharq also was given the assignment of speaking for Afghanistan at the annual U.N. debate (which did not take place due to passage of a consensus resolution). Another threat to Najibullah came from within the Army, which is dominated by adherents the rival Kalq faction who are portrayed as more hard line and more nationalistic. Reportedly, Najibullah himself confirmed rumors of an attempted military coup in October.

Concern about the internal crisis is thought by some analysis to lay behind the surprise appointment in mid-October 1988 of Yuli Vorontsov, First Deputy Foreign Minister and the prime negotiator of the Geneva accords, as the new Ambassador to Kabul.

During November 1988 the image of a rapidly disintegrating regime was given further credence when the interior minister Mohammed Gulabzoi, the lone Khalqi leader having a high echelon position, was forcibly sent to Moscow as Afghanistan's ambassador. In mid-November Deputy Foreign Minister Abdul Chaffer Lakanwal, another Khalqi, defected in New York while attending the U.N. General Assembly session, along with an Afghan diplomat. Reportedly, numerous Khalqis, have been arrested or sent into forced exile in the U.S.S.R. in the past month.

Afghan Resistance

The Afghan resistance forces constitute one of the most determined guerrilla movements in modern times. Several of the Islamist groups first went to armed opposition in the mid-1970s in reaction to the leftist tendencies of the government headed by Mohammed Khan Daoud. These groups formed the core of a low-level resistance shortly after the 1978 communist coup. Following the Soviet invasion in 1979, the resistance grew rapidly. It now fields 100,000 or more full and part-time fighters.

The bulk of the resistance is centered among the ethnic Pushtuns of southern Afghanistan, the Tajiks of the east and northeast, and, less importantly, the Uzbeks of the north. All of these groups subscribe to the Sunni branch of Islam. Less well known resistance groups also exist among the Hazara ethnic group of central Afghanistan, who -- like the Iranians -- follow the Shi'a branch of Islam.

The resistance groups are divided by ideology, ethnic makeup, and personal rivalries. Most of them operate in bands and tribal groups led by local commanders, but have ties to one or more larger political parties with headquarters in Peshawar, in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, and Quetta, in western Pakistan.

The Afghan Resistance Alliance. Seven of the political groups headquartered in Peshawar banded together in May 1985 into the Islamic Alliance of Afghanistan Mujahidin. The Alliance has only slowly begun to surmount deep divisions and rivalries. The Alliance has formed committees such as military affairs, supply, and education to promote better coordination. Decisions are made on the basis of consensus, but in reality the commanders in the field are largely independent of direction by the alliance or its constituent parties.

A striking fact about the seven parties in the Alliance is that most existed as political groups before the 1978 coup, and have been led by the same men for over a decade. Many of their field commanders, however, are new leaders whose authority rests on the basis of battlefield achievements. The main internal divisions are among the "Islamists," who aspire to varying degrees to construct an Afghan political and social system based on Islamic ideology, and the so-called "moderates" or "traditionalists." The latter are also Muslims but seek to restore a traditional political order in which religion is a more private and personal aspect of life.

Reaction to the Withdrawal Accord. The Afghan resistance groups deeply resent not having been a part of the U.N. negotiating process and have rejected the Geneva accord, vowing to continue the fight until the PDPA government is toppled. The guerrillas have shown little or no interest in giving the Soviets a "decent interval" in which to withdraw, but have steadily increased their military pressure on both regime and Soviet troops.

Bids to Form a Government. The resistance alliance has initiated several efforts at forming an alternative government and securing outside recognition. An "interim" government formed by the resistance groups in

Peshawar, Pakistan, failed to gain any real credibility and led to wrangling over the apportionment of ministries among the rival parties. In November, the resistance put forward a proposal for holding elections for a supervisory national council that would name a head of state with powers to negotiate a cease-fire with the Kabul government. The council would include about 400 elected and nominated members, chosen both in Afghanistan and from among the Afghan refugees. The October 31 announcement indicated a time frame of about 3 months for completing the process of organizing a government. Burnhanuddin Rabbani, current chairman of the resistance alliance, ruled out any communist participation in a government set up after the Soviet withdrawal.

U.N. Efforts at an Internal Settlement

During July the U.N. negotiator Diego Cordovez carried out a 9-day shuttle to Kabul, Islamabad, and Teheran during which he proposed a cease-fire by all Afghan factions by September 1 to be followed by an internal political settlement. The settlement would take the form of an interim "national government of peace and reconstruction" to be followed by a more permanent settlement via a traditional Afghan loya jirga (grand council). Reportedly, the main parties in the resistance alliance rejected the plan but it received support from an important fundamentalist commander, Jalaluddin Haqqani, and from the refugees, notables, and lower level field commanders (Far Eastern Economic Review, July 21, 1988: 28-29).

Afghan Refugees

The Soviet invasion of December 1979 raised an existing flow of refugees to Pakistan to a deluge. The government of Pakistan counts 2.9 million registered refugees. Another 1.5 million or more Afghans are thought to be in Iran, including 800,000 or more already there as migrant workers before the Soviet invasion. Fighting in border areas in late 1988 is said to have caused a new flood of as many as 10,000 refugees, while almost none have gone back to Afghanistan.

Many claim that the numbers of registered refugees in Pakistan are exaggerated, but it is also widely accepted that numerous Afghan refugees have never registered and have filtered into cities such as Peshawar and Karachi, where they have become a visible part of the local economy. The registered refugees are in some 320 camps in areas of Pakistan near the border with Afghanistan. The refugees come from all parts of Afghanistan, but the vast majority are from the Pushtun tribal groups generally located in the southern and eastern part of the country.

The refugee camps are administered by the Pakistan government with the aid and close cooperation of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Program. Various private voluntary organizations assist in the relief work. The refugees are provided with limited supplies of staples such as wheat, edible oil, sugar, tea, and kerosene, which are accounted for in family ration books. The amounts received vary with availability. Over the years the tent cities have turned into the mudwalled villages, with wells, and limited numbers of schools and clinics. In general, the Pakistan government does not permit the refugees

to undertake work or run businesses, but many men filter illegally into neighboring cities and towns to find work and supplement the issued rations.

A major concern in Pakistan is that the refugees may not return to Afghanistan even if the Soviets withdraw and peace is restored, let alone if intra-Afghan conflict continues. Some observers feel that the refugees have adapted to life in the camps and the relatively higher economic opportunities in Pakistan. Others distinguish between the majority of the refugees in the camps, who are seen as restless and demoralized, and a minority who have been able to start businesses or find work in the cities. The former are seen by many analysts as eager to return to their homes and farms, should peace be restored, while many of the latter may seek to remain in Pakistan.

To date no mechanisms have been established for the return of the refugees. Analysts anticipate that once Soviet and Afghan forces evacuate the southern border region many refugees will begin to return home on their own, but analysts also note that the time for planting summer crops has now passed -- a factor that may hinder any significant refugee flow this summer. A major inhibiting factor is the presence of millions of anti-personnel mines sown by the Soviets along a 40-50 mile corridor on the Afghan side of the Pakistan-Afghan border.

U.S. Policy

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, coming on the heels of the Iranian revolution, prompted a major reappraisal of U.S. regional security policy. The invasion was viewed as a potentially important strategic advance by the Soviets to warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Together with the Iranian hostage crisis, the invasion led the Carter Administration to develop the Rapid Deployment Force (later elevated into CENTCOM) and to rebuild ties to Pakistan that had been ruptured because of U.S. disapproval of Islamabad's efforts to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. The Reagan Administration continued the buildup of U.S. forces in the Arabian Sea/Persian Gulf region, and in October 1981 entered into an agreement with Pakistan on a 6-year, \$3.2 billion program of military and economic aid. Congress facilitated this program by fashioning a waiver to the application of U.S. nuclear nonproliferation legislation and providing appropriations more or less in line with the aid commitment. (For further information on issues in U.S.-Pakistan relations, see CRS Issue Brief 87227, Pakistan's Nuclear Program: Issues in U.S.-Pakistan Relations.)

At least until early 1988, U.S. criteria for ending the conflict were never defined in detail. The United States called for a Soviet withdrawal and for the restoration of Afghanistan's independence and nonalignment, but would not, for instance, comment on its terms for an internal political settlement save for stating that the matter was for "the Afghans" to decide.

The Administration's reticence to discuss the details of its policy objectives appeared to stem from both practical and domestic political

considerations. Initially, U.S. policymakers appeared to be pessimistic about the possibilities of obtaining a Soviet withdrawal but wanted to make the Soviets understand the costs of their adventurism. Later, the tenacity of the Afghan resistance raised the prospect of indefinitely delaying a Soviet consolidation, but the disunity of the resistance and its battlefield limitations appeared to make moot the issue of ultimate war objectives.

Policy Towards the U.N.-Sponsored Negotiations

Few in the Administration apparently saw any real prospect for a breakthrough under the U.N.-sponsored Geneva talks between Pakistan and the Kabul government. The United States was content to consult with Pakistan about the terms of the draft accord, but not to take the lead in crafting a bargaining position. U.S. statements in support of the talks appeared aimed mainly at parrying Soviet propaganda efforts to blame the United States for blocking a settlement.

With the assumption of power by Mikhail Gorbachev, the possibility emerged that the Soviets might actually withdraw as a result of a military stalemate and the failure to promote a viable communist government. While the United States was not a direct party to the talks, it increasingly took the lead in coordinating the joint U.S.-Pakistani stance. During the March 1988 round, U.S. representatives held separate discussions with their Soviet counterparts. The Administration continued to adhere to its insistence that a cutoff of U.S. and other aid to the resistance be conditioned on a similar Soviet cutoff of aid to the Kabul government, or, conversely, that U.S. aid continue so long as the Soviets were providing aid to their Afghan clients. This stance introduced an issue in the talks that had not been addressed in draft treaty language previously accepted by Pakistan, and thus shifted the focus of the talks to the superpower level.

Aid to the Afghan Resistance via Pakistan

A key element of the U.S. response has been collaboration with Pakistan on aid to the Afghan resistance. According to press reports, a low-level aid program involving the United States, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan began early in 1980. In these early years, the U.S.-organized program reportedly was limited to one that would provide "deniability" to Pakistan. This meant obtaining Soviet-made weapons or copies thereof from Egypt and China or other Eastern bloc weapons from the international black market and limiting the overall size of the program to about \$80 billion. Later, beginning about 1984, the program began to expand dramatically.

Currently, U.S. aid is estimated in press accounts as over \$600 million per year, with total funding since 1980 approaching \$2 billion. According to several sources, Saudi Arabia provides matching funds. Throughout the war Pakistan has suffered from repeated cross-border air attacks and terrorist bombings -- the latter believed to be carried out by the Afghan intelligence service. The Soviets have repeatedly warned Pakistan of dire consequences for the aid and sanctuary it has provided the resistance. On Aug. 4, 1988, as if to underscore its firmness, a

Pakistani F-16 for at least the third time shot down an intruding aircraft. The Soviet pilot was reportedly captured and held by the Pakistani authorities.

Still uncertain is the effect of the death of President Zia ul-Haq in a mysterious Aug. 17, 1988, plane crash, that also took the lives of the U.S. Ambassador and the senior U.S. military representatives as well as that of a number of high ranking Pakistani officers. The interim President has indicated his intention to continue to cooperation with the United States to aid the Afghan resistance, but who ultimately will inherit Zia's power and the nature of their policies remains unclear.

Role of Congress

Congress has played a major role in the rapid expansion of U.S. aid to the resistance in recent years. Reportedly, congressional pressure more than any other factor caused the growth in the level of U.S. aid and the decision to provide U.S. and European weapons systems such as Swiss anti-aircraft guns and U.S. "Stinger" anti-aircraft missiles.

Congressional initiatives also led to the provision of U.S. aid openly rather than through a covert program. Following passage of S.Con.Res. 74 in October 1984, which stated that the United States should "support effectively the people of Afghanistan in their fight for freedom," the Administration reprogrammed several million dollars in funds to establish a cross-border humanitarian program. The program subsequently became directly funded by Congress and grew from \$15 million in FY85 to \$45 million in FY89. Congress has also provided about \$10 million a year to the Department of Defense to transport humanitarian supplies to Pakistan for distribution across the border into Afghanistan.

In the final phase of the negotiations Congress continued to exercise influence over U.S. policy. A February 1988 "Sense of the Senate" resolution, that passed by 77-0, is widely credited with reinforcing the stance of the Reagan Administration that the United States would continue aid to the Afghan guerrillas as long as Moscow provides aid to the Kabul government.

Soviet Policy in Afghanistan

Background to the Invasion

Russia has historically sought influence over Afghanistan, a bordering country with close ethnic ties to the peoples of Soviet Central Asia. Yet through much of its history, Afghanistan managed to resist the designs of great powers, remaining neutral and independent. After the 1978 communist coup, the Soviet role in Afghanistan increased rapidly. The two countries signed a friendship treaty that included strong "mutual security" provisions. In addition the Soviet Union expanded an already substantial aid and trade relationship.

Within a year, Soviet satisfaction with developments in Afghanistan turned to concern. The communist takeover had triggered wide-spread

resistance, while the communist leaders turned against each other in bloody infighting. The Soviets were apparently alarmed when the more militant and mercurial Hafizullah Amin ousted Muhammad Taraki from the Afghan leadership and began a factional purge. On Dec. 24, 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan, ousted and executed Amin, replacing him with Babrak Karmal of the previously eclipsed "Parcham" wing. Soviet forces took charge of fighting what had by this time become a full-scale war against their occupation.

Gorbachev's Policy

Under Brezhnev's successors Andropov and Chernenko, the Soviet military presence and the level of fighting escalated, but all efforts at a quick military conclusion failed. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he too sought to further increase the military pressure on the resistance by qualitative improvement in Soviet forces. Despite this level of commitment, Soviet and Afghan military forces were largely stalemated by 1987.

Gorbachev continued to pour large amounts of money into Afghanistan. Aid deliveries were increased (\$1.6 billion had already been sent between 1979 and 1985), much of it going indirectly to support the Soviet presence. The overall bilateral trade volume more than tripled between the Soviet invasion and 1986 (virtually all of Afghanistan's official foreign trade is now with Warsaw Pact countries). The Soviets also moved to strengthen economic ties between Soviet and Afghan regional and local units, signing cooperation agreements with numerous districts and municipalities.

Politically, the Soviet position in Afghanistan was no more favorable than militarily. The Soviets had invested heavily in transforming Afghanistan's political and social structure, taking control of the government bureaucracy and sending thousands of Afghans to the Soviet Union for education. Yet support for Soviet policies continued to erode, as a steady flow of people defected from the Afghan government and military to the resistance. They also began to prepare the groundwork and raise expectations for withdrawal in statements to domestic audiences.

The Gorbachev leadership balanced its stepped-up physical presence in Afghanistan with increasing talk of withdrawal. At the 27th Soviet Communist Party Congress in 1986, Gorbachev gave his first detailed and very pessimistic assessment of prospects in Afghanistan, referring to it as a "bleeding wound." The Soviets gave tentative support to United Nations peace efforts in 1980 but until recently did not seem to be encouraging quick progress. After the summer of 1987, the Soviets showed new flexibility and a greater sense of urgency about reaching a settlement. In February 1988, Gorbachev announced that Soviet withdrawal could begin by May 15 and be completed within 10 months. Privately, the Soviets also offered to remove one half of their troops within 90 days, in line with a U.S. demand that withdrawal be front-loaded, and to withdraw all Soviet advisors except those tied to the Afghan Defense Ministry, according to press reports quoting official U.S. sources. The Soviets also gave up the demand that a U.S. aid cut-off must precede Soviet withdrawal. The Soviets also dropped previous preconditions regarding the

future make-up of an Afghan government or the role of the communist party. On Dec. 10, 1987, while at the summit in Washington, Gorbachev signaled his lack of concern about who governed in Kabul after the Soviets left. He reemphasized it in his Feb. 8, 1988, statement on Afghanistan.

Motivations of Recent Soviet Policy

Recent Soviet actions and statements have led to a debate about Moscow's motivations and objectives. A growing number of analysts judge that the Soviet Union decided to cut its losses and get out of Afghanistan, seeking only to save face. While Moscow may still be hoping that its communist clients can maintain control by broadening their support base, these experts do not believe there is much danger that the Soviet Union can achieve, without direct military presence the objectives -- consolidation of a pro-Soviet socialist Afghanistan -- which they could not achieve with their forces.

These experts argue that Soviet leaders had to reappraise the costs and benefits of their war in Afghanistan and concluded that intervention in Afghanistan was a mistake and, that the military, economic, and political costs already outweighed the benefits and were still rising.

Soviet disillusionment is said to be fueled by several factors. First, the situation on the ground in Afghanistan has reached a political and military stalemate that would be difficult to break even with the infusion of larger Soviet resources. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union is sustaining considerable military costs and losses. The Soviets have suffered some 35,000 or more casualties, dead and wounded since 1979. They have lost hundreds of aircraft. By its own account Moscow has lost 12,000-15,000 men. The Soviet Union has had to pour increasing economic resources into Afghanistan with few positive results from the investment. Support for the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan is very small and dwindling.

Second, under Gorbachev the Soviet Union has shifted policies and priorities to domestic modernization. This is to be attained through economic reform and "glasnost," selective shifting of resources, economic cooperation with the West, and the gain of at least a pause in the arms race and global military competition with the United States. The war in Afghanistan is a direct obstacle to the success of the Gorbachev program. It is a drain on the Soviet Union, making it more difficult for Moscow to shift resources from the military to the civilian economy. It complicates efforts to increase economic cooperation and ease tensions with the West, and to change the Soviet Union's image in the World.

Third, the occupation of Afghanistan continues to take a very heavy toll on the Soviet Union's global prestige and influence, especially in the Islamic nations and the Third World. The vast majority of countries have formally condemned the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan at the United Nations. This predicament comes at a time when the Soviet Union is actively seeking to improve its image as a constructive player on the international scene.

Fourth, Soviet public opposition to the war has grown large and vocal. To some extent the Gorbachev leadership has encouraged this opposition by its decision to give increasing publicity to the war and allowing the media to portray it in an extremely negative light.

Other experts take a much more pessimistic or cautious view. They see the Soviet withdrawal of troops as a process that could be stopped or reversed. They also suspect that the Soviets may be seeking to achieve through the back door -- subversion, covert action, use of a new generation of Soviet educated Afghans -- what they have been unable to achieve by direct intervention. They may be hoping to manipulate the inevitable discord among competing factions of any new coalition government to maintain influence, in keeping with past Soviet behavior. Some analysts believe it more likely that they have given up the goal of dominating the entire country, at least for the time being, and may now embark on a deliberate strategy of fragmentation, with the aim of absorbing the northern part of Afghanistan.

Evolution of the Geneva Accord

Background to the Talks

From June 1982 through September 1987 Pakistan and Afghanistan conducted 11 rounds of indirect, "proximity" talks at Geneva under the mediation of the special representative of the U.N. Secretary-General. For several years the talks appeared to serve the diplomatic objectives of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the U.S.S.R., but did not offer much hope of a real settlement. Afghanistan kept pressing Pakistan, without success, for direct face-to-face negotiations as a form of recognition and for concluding a bilateral accord on "noninterference" in each other's internal affairs. Pakistan sought, equally unsuccessfully, substantive discussions of a Soviet troop withdrawal. Notwithstanding the impasse, the U.N. negotiator, Diego Cordovez, kept the talks moving by fits and starts towards a comprehensive framework involving four "instruments": non-interference; international guarantees; return of the refugees; and "interrelationships." The fourth instrument connects the other instruments to a Soviet troop withdrawal, and establishes the modalities for monitoring and verifying the Soviet withdrawal, the voluntary return of the refugees to their homes, and the cessation of Pakistani support to the Afghan resistance.

The negotiating draft provided for a neutral and non-aligned Afghanistan, but did not specifically address the issue of Kabul's relationship to Moscow. The agreement is structured as a bilateral accord between Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also provides a role for the Soviet Union and the United States as "guarantors" of non-interference.

Following the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev the talks began to gather some momentum, despite momentary breakdowns. The Afghans long remained adamant, however, about not offering a time frame for a Soviet troop withdrawal until Pakistan agreed to direct negotiations. Pakistan remained equally firm about not agreeing to direct talks, and ultimately Kabul (under instructions from Moscow) backed down.

Main Issues in the Talks and their Resolution

Time Table for Withdrawal. Following Gorbachev's February 1986 speech to the 27th Party Congress, in which he expressed a desire to withdraw the Soviet forces "in the nearest future," the Afghans finally came forward with a time frame offer. The initial offer was rejected outright by Pakistan, which insisted on a short time frame of 3-4 months. In succeeding sessions, however, the Afghan side progressively lowered the figure until the September 1987 round, where the bargaining stood at 16 months for the Afghans versus 8 months for Pakistan.

Beginning in late 1987 the Soviets publicly offered to reduce the withdrawal time frame to 12 months or less. In the Geneva accord, the Afghan offer of a 9-month time frame beginning on May 15, 1988, was finally accepted.

Issue of Symmetry in the Accord. The last issue to be resolved in reaching an accord was one raised by the United States and one that could only be resolved at the superpower level. As negotiated by Pakistan, the draft text did not address the issue of Soviet aid to the Afghan government, but the United States insisted that it would not agree to support or guarantee an accord that did not provide for either positive or negative symmetry. The United States argued that if Moscow aided its Kabul allies the United States had to be free to continue support to the mujahidin. In the end, the issue was resolved in favor of the U.S. insistence on symmetry via a U.S.-Soviet "understanding," although the actual accord still calls for a cessation of "interference" by Pakistan irrespective of Soviet aid to the Kabul government.

Question of Guarantors. In December 1985, following the Reagan-Gorbachev summit, the United States modified its previously publicly supportive but noncommittal attitude towards the talks. In a letter to the Secretary-General that has since become a focus of criticism by some U.S. supporters of the Afghan resistance, the Reagan Administration expressed its willingness in principle to be a guarantor of the agreement "provided that the central issue of a Soviet troop withdrawal and its interrelationship to the other instruments were resolved" (New York Times, Dec. 14, 1985). The United States, along with the Soviet Union, did in the final agreement act as guarantor.

Current Issues for U.S. Policy

Despite the accord and the beginning of a Soviet withdrawal, a number of issues remain for U.S. policy. These include, especially, how and to what extent to carry out the commitment to continue aid to the resistance so long as Moscow continues to aid its Moscow allies, and the role for the United States in facilitating an internal settlement and the return of the refugees.

U.S. Aid to the Resistance

According to press reports the United States had continued to provide military supplies to the Afghan resistance via Pakistan. Reportedly, following the April 10 explosion at a military camp in the Islamabad capitol region of Pakistan, which caused a heavy loss of civilian life and destroyed tons of ammunition destined for the Afghan resistance, the United States rushed new supplies to Pakistan.

In late May, on the eve of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit, Moscow began to complain sharply about Pakistan's alleged continued "interference" in Afghanistan through its support of the Afghan resistance. Before and during the summit the Soviets implied that they might slow their withdrawal in reaction. Moscow threatened "far reaching consequences" if the Geneva accord was "ruined" by continued resistance attacks on Soviet forces. By November senior Soviet spokesmen became quite explicit about "suspending" the withdrawal while stopping short of signalling that they did not intend to meet the Feb. 15, 1989, deadline for a complete pullout.

U.S. analysts reportedly feel that the Soviets are unlikely reverse their withdrawal, partly on grounds that the fewer troops that are left the more precarious will be their position. Some commentators have judged that the situation may be unravelling faster than the Soviets estimated, jeopardizing their goal of a "decent interval" before the collapse of the Najibullah government.

According to some assessments, Deputy Foreign Secretary Vorontsov has been sent with the explicit objective of achieving some kind of a political accord that would retain some Soviet influence, even at the expense of dumping Najibullah. According to this line of analysis, the Soviets will first try to get some resistance leader to agree to a coalition with PDPA and non-party figures, but failing that they may even seek direct talks with resistance field commanders. Other analysts agree that the Soviets are proposed to stay on after February 15 if that is necessary to prevent a military and political debacle.

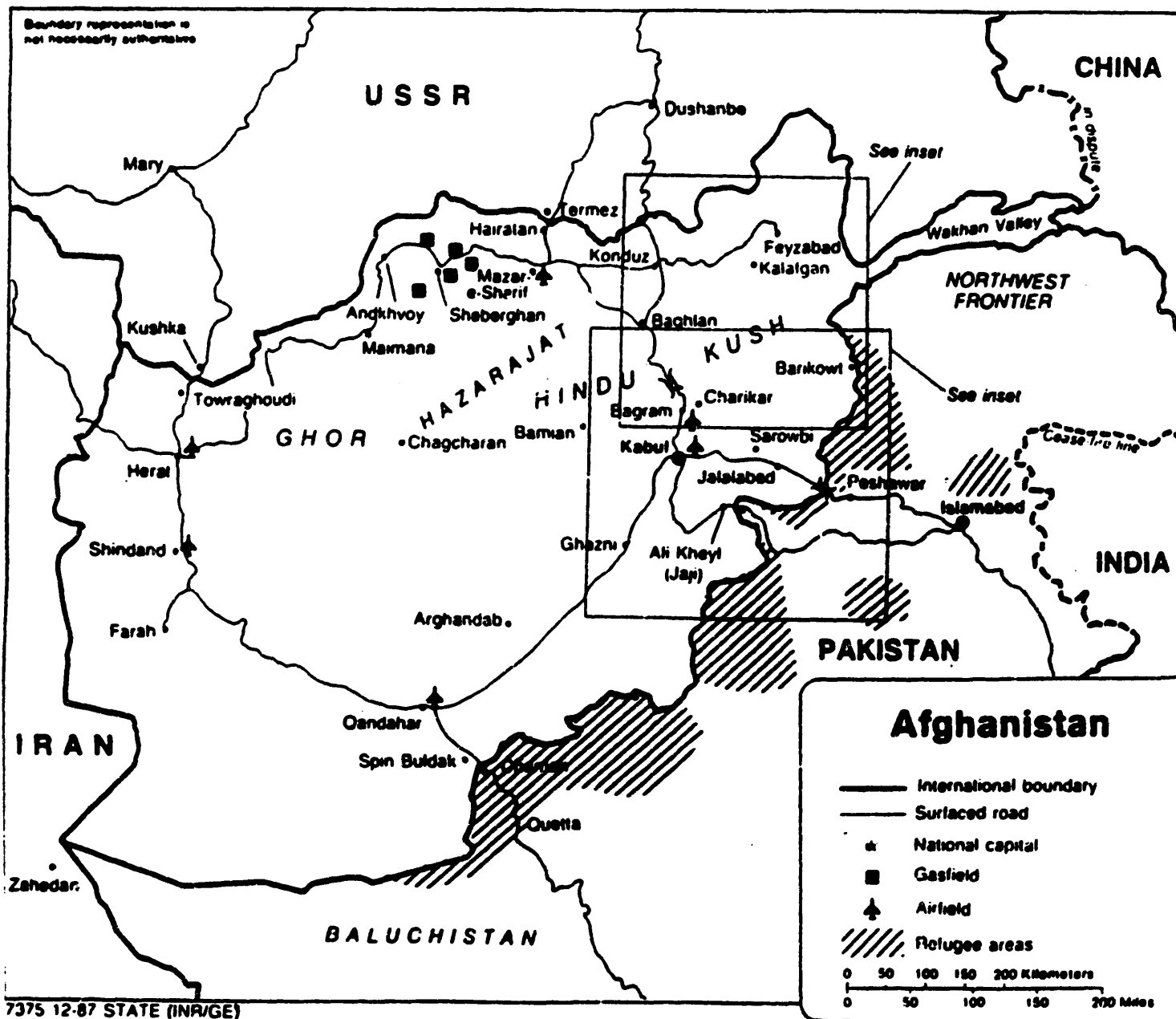
One issue for U.S. policy is how far to press the Soviets by supplying the resistance. Some argue that the United States must match not only new supplies that the Soviets may send to their Kabul allies, but also the tons of material being left by departing Soviet troops to insure a victory by the resistance. Others argue that political factors, not material, will determine the outcome of the internal Afghan conflict, and that the United States should not jeopardize the Soviet withdrawal and the accord itself by continuing to supply extensive aid to the resistance forces.

Thus far there is every indication that arms continue to flow across the Pakistan border, although some unconfirmed reports say that Pakistan may be limiting the flow of sophisticated weapons such as the "Stinger" anti-aircraft missile and long range surface-to-surface rockets. The guerrillas themselves have given no indication of any desire to give the Soviets a respite or "decent" interval, and are competing with each other to occupy vacated outposts and overrun remaining Afghan army garrisons.

Aid for Refugee Resettlement and Reconstruction

Some Members of Congress and others feel that the United States should play a major role in facilitating the return of the refugees and the reconstruction of the country. The return of the refugees is currently impeded by the continuing conflict and a lack of any resettlement mechanism. The FY89 foreign assistance appropriation bill included \$23 million in emergency refugee aid to be channelled either through international auspices or through the existing U.S. funded cross-border aid program, which was funded at \$45 million for FY89. The Act includes a provision that bars expenditure of emergency refugee funds through the "Soviet-controlled government of Afghanistan."

U.S. objections to channeling any aid through the current Afghan government have also been a factor in the lack of reaction to the request of the U.N. Secretary General for \$1.7 billion for relief and rehabilitation in Afghanistan for an initial period of 18 months. Although some Western governments have expressed support, relief workers have termed the appeal premature in view of the ongoing conflict.



Source: U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Public Affairs. Afghanistan: Eight Years of Soviet Occupation. Special Report No. 173. December 1987. p. 2.